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ABSTRACT

The Colorado Digitization Project (CDP) commissioned the Library Research Service (LRS) of the Colorado State Library and the University of Denver Library and Information Science Program to evaluate user perceptions of the relative merits of the catalog (or database) and the exhibit approaches to providing access to digital information, especially digital images of artifacts, photographs, and other documents. The catalog approach is generally associated with libraries, while the exhibit approach is more common in museums. This evaluation combined PowerPoint and Web presentations with focus group interviews of three CDP clienteles: hobbyists, K-12 students, and general users. Each focus group interview was set up in a presentation/reaction format, beginning with a presentation of appropriate sample library and museum web sites, followed by the questions that comprised the focus group interview. Each group was presented with a scenario based on a specific assigned reason for utilizing digital resources. Relevance to needs, reasons for use, and impacts of virtual museum visits and of virtual library visits on actual visits are identified for each group. The conclusions of this evaluation were found to be consistent with three primary motivations of the Colorado Digitization Project: improving access to educational resources via digital format; aiding in the preservation of rare artifacts, photographs, and other documents; and encouraging users of museums in particular to visit in-person more often by attracting them with creative virtual exhibits. Focus group contacts are listed at the end of the report. (AEF)

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A Focus Group Evaluation for the Colorado Digitization Project

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A Focus Group Evaluation for the Colorado Digitization Project

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The Colorado Digitization Project (CDP) commissioned the Library Research Service (LRS) of the Colorado State Library and the University of Denver Library and Information Science Program to evaluate user perceptions of the relative merits of the catalog (or database) and the exhibit approaches to providing access to digital information, especially digital images of artifacts, photographs, and other documents. The catalog approach is generally associated with libraries, while the exhibit approach is more common in museums. Issues of concern regarding these alternative and complementary approaches included:

- Users' anticipated reasons for utilizing digital resources;
- User preferences for the catalog and exhibit approaches for different purposes, reasons for these preferences, and perceptions of the value of specific elements of the catalog and exhibit approaches;
- The likely impact of virtual visits to libraries and museums on actual visits.

This evaluation combined PowerPoint and Web presentations with focus group interviews of three CDP clienteles: hobbyists, K-12 students, and general users. During late June and early July 2001, organizations were solicited and individuals were recruited for focus groups representing each of these clienteles:

- To represent hobbyists, 10 volunteers were recruited from the congregation of the First Christian Church of Boulder.
- To represent students (K-12), eight students were recruited from the Young Adult reading group at Littleton's Bemis Public Library.

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- To represent general users, seven members were recruited from the Colorado Mountain Club.

Each organization that provided participants in one of the focus groups received $500 in compensation for their members' participation. Current employees of libraries and museums were asked to identify themselves and to disqualify themselves from participating.

The presentations to and interviews of these three focus groups were conducted on July 11 (first group) and July 18 (other 2 groups), respectively.

Each focus group interview was set up in a presentation/reaction format, beginning with a presentation of appropriate sample library and museum web sites, followed by the questions that comprised the focus group interview. Tammi Moe, the LRS webmaster and a student in DU's Library and Information Science program, developed the presentations and delivered them in-person to each focus group. (PowerPoint files utilized in these presentations may be found on the accompanying diskette. Associated Web pages shown to each group were downloaded onto the accompanying CD-ROM.) Each group was presented with a scenario based on a specific assigned reason for utilizing digital resources:

- The hobbyist group viewed web sites selected to help them prepare a Centennial celebration in their community.
- The student group viewed sites about the 1929 Canon City prison riots; their scenario was writing a school paper on this topic.
- The general user group viewed museum and library web sites that would assist them in planning a tour of downtown Denver for an out-of-town visitor.

These presentations and the moderator guide which follows were developed in collaboration with Keith Curry Lance, LRS Director, and Marti A. Cox, LRS Senior Research Analyst.

A Comparison of Web-Based Library Catalogs and Museum Exhibits and Their Impacts on Actual Visits

A Focus Group Evaluation for the Colorado Digitization Project

Moderator Guide

The focus group interviews were conducted by Thomas K. Fry of Fry Associates. Each interview consisted of the following questions:

1. In the presentation you've just seen, there were two approaches to information: the museum or exhibit approach and the library or catalog approach. Which of these did you find more relevant to your needs? Why? Of the approach you did not find the most relevant, what are the drawbacks to it from your point of view?

2. The museum approach is more directive, often telling a story, while the library approach is unstructured, but more detailed. What are some reasons you would use each of these approaches?

3. After viewing the museum program would you be more inclined to actually visit the museum or less inclined? For what reasons?

4. After viewing the library program would you be more inclined to actually visit the library or less inclined? For what reasons?

5. On the handout are some reasons for using digitized resources. Please rank these in order of importance to you with 1 being most important:
    a. Links to other resources/photos
    b. Descriptive information/interpretation
    c. Biography
    d. Brief explanations accompanying photos
    e. Ability to purchase photos
    f. Controlling the way I look for and find information
    g. Enjoying a well-done presentation
    h. Knowing that rare documents are being preserved and protected, yet having access
    i. Having access to rare documents and photos from my own computer
    j. Luxury of home access/no need to visit museum or library
    k. Piques my interest and makes me want to visit the museum or library to see more and to see the originals

6. The library record often has additional information on such things as source of photo or image, size, date, who originated/took

photos, subject description, subject headings, related subjects. Are these features useful to you?

The Hobbyists: Planning a Centennial Celebration

Ten members of the First Christian Church of Boulder congregation participated in the hobbyist focus group. Individually, their estimated annual visits to libraries ranged from two to 36. Their estimated annual visits to museums ranged from two to six.

Because these individuals share a common interest in local history, their scenario involved planning a centennial celebration for a community, in which a day in the life of the founders would be recreated.

Relevance to Needs

Members of the hobbyist group were evenly divided in their preferences for the museum and library approaches.

Reasons given for preferring the museum approach included:
- "more pictures,"
- "more visual," and
- "like presentation."

Reasons given for preferring the library approach included:
- "like words better" and
- "like being in control."

All participants agreed with a statement by one of this group: "If I didn't have a clue about the topic, I'd use the museum first and then the library to get more detail."

Reasons for Use

When asked to identify reasons why they would choose the museum approach, hobbyists responded:
- "to get a general overview, background;"
- "like being able to print out and/or purchase photos;"
- "like that it is controlled, this is what you'll see;" and

- "exhibit represents biases of those who prepare it."

When asked to identify reasons why they would choose the library approach, hobbyists responded:

- "to authenticate dates, to get more detail;"
- "get facts for speakers, (assuming this as part of the Centennial celebration);"
- "the library will have everything, the museum just selected things;" and
- "to search for it;"

Both approaches were perceived as reducing the wear-and-tear on artifacts and helping to preserve our past.

Impact of Virtual Museum Visits on Actual Visits

A major concern about facilitating virtual visits to museums is that it might reduce actual visits. The views of this group of hobbyists help to allay this fear.

- Six of the group said they were more inclined to visit the museum after viewing exhibits on a website.
- Three indicated that viewing a virtual visit probably would not affect the likelihood of their actually visiting the museum.
- One said that it would depend on the museum and their level of interest in the topic.
- Only one indicated being less inclined to visit a museum after seeing virtual exhibits on its website.

Impact of Virtual Library Visits on Actual Visits

While the library community is less concerned about virtual visits supplanting actual ones, a similar question was posed regarding that type of institution. Interestingly, almost all members of the hobbyist group felt less inclined to visit the library if information and images were available online. Only one group member was more inclined to visit the library in person after making a virtual visit. This individual felt that more detail would be available at the library, expressing some doubt that everything needed could be found online.

Reasons for Using Digitized Resources

For the hobbyist group, the three most important reasons for using digital resources were:

- Having access to rare documents and photographs from their own computers,
- Links to additional photographs and other resources,
- Knowing that rare documents are being preserved and protected, but yet having access to them.

Table 1. Rankings of Reasons for Use by Participant for Hobbyists

Reason for use	Rankings by participant										Total	Ave-Rage
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10		
Links	5	1	3	7	1	6	2	6	2	4	37	3.7
Description	3	2	6	5	4	8	4	7	3	3	45	4.5
Biography	7	6	7	6	5	7	6	8	4	6	62	6.2
Brief explanations	4	5	5	3	6	9	7	11	1	9	60	6.0
Purchase photos	11	11	11	4	11	11	8	10	11	7	95	9.5
Control	10	8	9	8	10	10	1	9	9	11	85	8.5
Enjoy presentation	2	10	4	9	9	5	9	4	6	10	67	6.7
Preservation	1	7	1	1	3	2	10	5	6	2	38	3.8
Access from own computer	6	3	2	2	2	4	5	2	8	1	35	3.5
Luxury/no need to visit	8	4	8	10	7	3	3	3	10	5	61	6.1
Piques interest	9	9	10	11	8	1	11	1	7	8	75	7.5

These factors were important to group members for a variety of reasons:

- Virtual access will save time. Virtual visits can be made on the user's schedule. Transportation to a museum or library is unnecessary. Being able to search digital collections before actually making a visit would save time.
- There was a general feeling that preservation of historical artifacts is very important and that this technology keeps the artifacts available to the public. (One dissenting opinion was expressed: "What good is an original if you can't see it?")
- The group deemed links to other relevant resources both useful and time-saving. One participant thought it analogous to browsing in a library, and thus discovering additional useful information.

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Usefulness of Catalog Features

Most members of the hobbyist group believe that the detailed information on the catalog record is very useful. Such information includes: source, size, date, photographer, subject description, subject headings, and related subjects. For this group's purpose—planning a community's centennial celebration—such facts would be very useful, but their utility in other situations would depend on the circumstances.

The Students: Researching a School Paper

Eight middle and high school students who are members of the Young Adult reading group at Littleton's Bemis Public Library participated in the K-12 student group. This group included three 7th graders, two 8th graders, and one student each in grades 9, 10, and 11. They visit the library frequently, ranging from once every other week to more than once a week year-round. Their museum visits ranged from one to ten a year.

Because these public school students are required to study Colorado history, their scenario involved researching a paper on the Colorado State Penitentiary Riot of 1929.

Relevance to Needs

The museum approach was preferred by most members of the student group. This is especially noteworthy because of their greater experience with libraries than museums. Their reasons for finding the museum approach more relevant included:

- "all the facts are right there;"
- "all the information is right there, you don't have to search for it;"
- "pictures tell a story;" and
- "it's more organized, it's easier to find information."

By comparison, the library approach was found to be too text-oriented, boring, and more complicated. Particular drawbacks anticipated with using the library approach included:

- "It's confusing,"
- "It takes too long,"
- "I get bored reading descriptions,"

- "You have to type in exactly what you want and if you misspell something, then you won't find what you're looking for."

Reasons for Use

The students interviewed indicated that they would utilize the museum approach for longer projects, believing they would gather more facts that way.

If they were preparing a speech or designing a poster, they would consult the library. Two specific capabilities of digital images appreciated by students are the ability to enlarge them and to download them into papers.

Impact of Virtual Museum Visits on Actual Visits

Students interviewed were evenly divided on the issue of how visiting a museum virtually would affect their actual visits. Reasons they would continue to visit the museum in-person include:

- "want to take longer to look at artifacts,"
- "want to really see the artifact,"
- "don't like sitting at the computer," and
- "viewing something on a computer is not the same as actually seeing it."

Reasons for reducing actual museum visits, given virtual access, include:

- "the hassle of getting to the museum,"
- "wouldn't really be able to touch the artifact, even at the museum," and
- "it's all right there on the computer."

Impact of Virtual Library Visits on Actual Visits

Unlike the Hobbyist focus group, the Student group is more inclined to visit the library, given virtual access. Reasons include:

- "Can't view the entire work on the web."
- It's easier to find information in the library than on the web."
- "You have to sift through so much on the web."
- "May only end up with a little bit of useful information after a lot of searching."

Reasons for Using Digitized Resources

The most important reasons for students using digitized resources include:

- controlling how to look for and find information,
- knowing that rare documents are being preserved,
- links to other resources,
- luxury of home access/no need to visit, and
- having access from remote computers.

These students were quite aware of the benefit of being able to view resources from their own computers. They perceived this as a benefit because "people are lazy;" "they don't want to get up, shower, and get dressed;" "gasoline prices are high;" and they like being able to "start and stop whenever [they] want to—24/7."

Preservation was also important to members of the student group. They ranked this factor highly, appreciating that things from the past are protected by making images of them available for viewing. They also appreciate that virtual images are more widely available and accessible.

Table 2. Rankings of Reasons for Use by Participant for Students

Reason for use	Rankings by participant								Total	Ave-Rage
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8		
Links	4	7	9	3	1	2	6	4	36	4.5
Description	1	4	5	2	11	6	7	10	46	5.8
Biography	7	1	7	5	6	9	5	9	49	6.1
Brief explanations	5	8	10	8	7	7	9	8	62	7.8
Purchase photos	11	9	11	7	10	11	10	2	71	8.9
Control	6	3	1	1	4	8	4	7	34	4.3
Enjoy presentation	9	10	4	4	5	3	3	6	44	5.5
Preservation	8	2	6	6	2	1	5	5	35	4.4
Access from own computer	2	6	8	9	8	5	1	3	42	5.3
Luxury/no need to visit	3	4	3	10	3	10	8	1	42	5.3
Piques interest	10	5	2	11	9	4	2	11	54	6.8

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Usefulness of Catalog Features

There was general agreement in the Student group that if they needed information for a detailed paper, the links provided in the catalog record would be useful. However, they did not find the descriptive data in the catalog record very useful or necessary.

General Users: Planning an Historic Tour of Downtown Denver

Seven members of the Colorado Mountain Club participated in the General Users group. Their library visits ranged from none in the past 12 months to as many as 10 visits in a year. Their museum visits ranged from one to 10 visits in a year.

Because these individuals live in the Denver area and regularly entertain out-of-town family and friends, their assignment was to plan a tour of historic buildings in downtown Denver.

Relevance to Needs

For this purpose, most of the participants felt that the museum approach was best. Their reasons included:

- "It starts with a broad theme or outline."
- "It has a pre-packaged, canned program."
- "It's designed for those who don't know what they are seeking."
- "You don't know what you don't know, so the presentation style is better."

The two participants who prefer the library approach gave the following reasons:

- "It's easier to use for a specific interest."
- "There is a lot of detail we can use to create our own tour."

One acknowledged drawback to the library approach is that it is "too detailed for this purpose."

Reasons for Use

Group members envisioned using each approach in given circumstances:

- They found the museum approach useful "when you don't know exactly what you want."
- The library approach was viewed as preferable in situations in which more control over searching is needed. Such situations would include searches for specific information and more in-depth research.

Impact of Virtual Museum Visits on Actual Visits

The participants were evenly divided about how a virtual visit to a museum would affect their inclination to visit in-person.

- Three said they would be more inclined to actually visit, three others said they would be less inclined to do so, and the remaining group member said a virtual visit would have no effect on his actual visits.
- Of those less inclined to visit a museum, reasons focused on the difficulty of getting to the museum and a reluctance to return downtown on a weekend or evening after working there all week.

Impact of Virtual Library Visits on Actual Visits

Opinion was far less divided regarding the impact of virtual library visits on actual ones. Six of the seven participants would be less inclined to visit the library in-person after making a virtual visit. They would only wish to visit the library to obtain a book or other item needed to plan the tour.

Reasons for Using Digitized Resources

The most important reasons given for using digital resources were:

- having access to rare documents and photographs from one's own computer,
- the luxury of having home access and not needing to visit in-person,
- the descriptive information available for online images.

This group is very appreciative of home or office access. They feel that 24/7 access is important, and they like being able to obtain information whenever they want, stopping and restarting at their own

convenience. They prefer not to drive downtown to visit a museum or library, and they appreciate not having to bother a librarian to see a photograph or document. If they visited a museum or library, it would be as a destination trip or outing. The descriptive information would be useful in planning a tour for a visiting family member. These participants are concerned that rare and valuable artifacts are deteriorating or being discarded. They appreciate that originals are being preserved properly.

Table 3. Rankings of Reasons for Use by Participant for General Users

Reason for use	Rankings by participant							Total	Ave-Rage
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7		
Links	4	6	2	2	7	7	5	33	4.7
Description	5	3	3	3	2	4	7	27	3.9
Biography	9	8	10	9	6	6	11	59	8.4
Brief explanations	6	5	4	4	5	5	9	38	5.4
Purchase photos	8	7	8	11	3	10	6	53	7.6
Control	7	9	5	1	8	9	4	43	6.1
Enjoy presentation	10	4	6	5	11	11	10	57	8.1
Preservation	1	10	9	10	10	3	2	45	6.4
Access from own computer	2	1	1	6	1	2	1	14	2.0
Luxury/no need to visit	3	2	7	7	4	1	3	27	3.9
Piques interest	11	11	11	8	9	8	8	66	9.4

Usefulness of Catalog Features

The participants were unanimous in agreeing that the detailed, descriptive information included with library records is important. They feel that this adds value from a research standpoint.

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Conclusions

1. Most participants prefer the museum approach to the library approach to information. They appreciate the organization, theme, story, and the work that goes into preparing an exhibit. One participant stated the essence of this by saying that the person who put together the exhibit knew more about the topic than he did, so he would benefit from the organization and presentation.

2. For the most part, having access to digitized images would result in slightly more inclination to visit museums. There is general knowledge that the presentations on the web represent only part of the museum's holdings and that these presentations pique the interest of the participants, making them want to see more of the museum's holdings.

3. Having access to digitized images would result in markedly less inclination to visit libraries by the hobbyist and general user groups, but more inclination to visit by the student group. The student group needs complete information and therefore wants to be in the library where the resources are located. The student group appreciates the organization of information in a library and feels that this makes their research task more productive and time-efficient when done in a library.

4. Home access to images of rare and valuable resources is very important. The convenience and ability to gain access 24/7 is appreciated.

5. Preservation of rare and valuable resources is very important. There is widespread knowledge of, and appreciation for, preservation efforts.

6. The detailed information presented in a catalog record is useful for in-depth research, but it is not necessary for casual use.

The conclusions of this evaluation are consistent with three primary motivations of the Colorado Digitization Project:

- improving access to educational resources via digital format;
- aiding in the preservation of rare artifacts, photographs, and other documents; and

- encouraging users of museums in particular to visit in-person more often by attracting them with creative virtual exhibits.

Focus Group Contacts

Group 1: Hobbyists

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Group 2: Student K-12

Bemis Public Library Young Adult Reading Group
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Group 3: General user

Colorado Mountain Club
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